

Getting Started:

A Practical Guide for Building an Early Career Educator Group/Network

INTENDED FOR STATE AFFILIATE STAFF IN AN ECE ADVISORY/LIAISON ROLE

Just getting started building an Early Career Educator (ECE) network in your union? This practical guide will show you how to engage new leaders in the work of our union.

Table of Contents

Why Focus on Early Career Educators?	2
Building a Core Team for your ECE Group	3
Attracting ECEs with Tailored Events	5
Best Practices from Affiliates with Successful ECE Groups	6
<i>Appendix 1: ECE Engagement Map</i>	7

The National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest professional employee organization, is committed to advancing the cause of public education. NEA's three million members work at every level of education—from pre-school to university graduate programs. NEA has affiliate organizations in every state and in more than 14,000 communities across the United States.

Our Leadership:

Becky Pringle, NEA President
Princess R. Moss, NEA Vice President
Noel Candelaria, NEA Secretary-Treasurer
Kim A. Anderson, NEA Executive Director

NEA Executive Committee:

Mark Jewell, North Carolina
Gladys Fátima Márquez, Illinois
Ron "Duff" Martin, Wisconsin
Robert V. Rodriguez, California
Christine Sampson-Clark, New Jersey
Hanna Vaandering, Oregon

Why Focus on Early Career Educators?

“Early Career Educators are vital to both the current and future success of our collective NEA. Today’s new educators are the dreamers, the fighters, and the leaders of today and tomorrow, who will continue our righteous struggle to secure a quality public education for every single student long into the future. Without Early Career Educators, there is no NEA.”

– Noel Candelaria, Secretary-Treasurer, National Education Association

It’s a tough world out there for new educators—and they are voting with their feet. Our message to new educators is simple: Their Union is where they find their power.

SUPPORTING ECE GROUPS IS A WIN-WIN FOR STATE AFFILIATES!

→ Growth

States with ECE groups establish stronger relationships with Aspiring Educator members, improving new educator recruitment and retention.

→ Leadership

These programs will develop and train the next generation of union leaders and activists, easing the burdens placed on current leaders and ensuring the strength of our union in the long term.

→ Energy

ECEs will bring in energy as they organize on behalf of our students, bargain for the issues they care about, engage school boards, and lead on racial and economic justice.

WHAT KINDS OF THINGS DOES AN ECE GROUP DO?

Our research has shown that most ECEs have interests that fall into these three buckets: union leadership, activist training, and professional development. ECE groups engage in a wide variety of activities connected to these three topics. Some ECE groups hold professional development trainings tailored to the needs of ECEs, while others focus more on collective advocacy for ECEs or training the next generation of union leaders. For more examples of ways that ECEs can get involved in the union, see Appendix 1.

ECE GROUP



Building a Core Team for your ECE Group



The cyclical model for organizing and sustaining an ECE Group.

Building a Core Team for your ECE Group *(Continued)*

Identifying New Leaders for your ECE Group's Core Team

Like any effective organization or group, the most successful ECE groups run more efficiently when there is a strong core team in charge instead of a single person. Often, some of the best natural leaders are not already in positions of power, especially educators early on in their careers. Consider the following questions to help identify leaders for your group's core team:



Communication

Which ECEs are skilled at presenting information in a compelling way and collecting feedback from others?



Passion and Commitment

Which ECEs constantly exceed expectations to benefit others?



Confidence

Which ECEs will have confidence in the decisions they make for the group? Who can rebound from failure?



Creativity

Who can come up with out-of-the-box solutions to varied challenges?



Empathy

Who will members trust to work with them on sensitive matters?

**Not everyone on your team will be strong in all areas. The best teams have a blend of strengths, with each member bringing unique skills and perspectives to the table.*

Engaging Your New Leaders in the ECE Group

After identifying your new leaders, it's time to engage them in building an ECE group. Have a sit-down conversation with your leaders to get them excited about starting something new! The New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) calls this "Planting the Seed," and they suggest these helpful tips:

Setting

Choose a location that will facilitate open conversation, like a round table. If possible, hold the conversation in person.

Topics

Let the conversation flow, but keep a few pre-determined topics on hand, like student debt, equity, or classroom management.

Keep an Open Mind

Remember to listen and try not to get stuck on "it has not been done like this before."

Remember Your Goal

You are there to inspire their leadership and spark their excitement about starting something new!

It may take more than one meeting to engage your leaders, and that's okay! You may want to use your first meeting to begin planning your first ECE engagement event. Whatever you decide, remember that your main goal is to get your leaders excited about building the ECE group. Once you have done that, it's time to plan your first events for the new ECE group.

Attracting ECEs with Tailored Events

Now that you have formed a core team to lead your ECE group, the next step is for them to plan events to engage other ECEs. Successful ECE groups constantly seek to ensure ECEs have ownership and voice in the organization.

What kinds of engagements should we plan?

There are many kinds of events you could plan for the first meeting of your ECE group. You may want to use the data from the YRO Survey Cards to identify topics of interest for your ECEs. It is probably a good idea to keep the first meeting somewhat low-stakes. While some ECEs may be excited to jump in headfirst, others might be less comfortable engaging with the union. Consider partnering with one of our NEA centers for your meetings. Not only is this a great way to highlight the valuable work of the union, but it can also ease the burden placed on your core team! Below are some examples of events with potential partners.

Student Debt: PSLF 101

Consider partnering with NEA Member Benefits

Equity in the Classroom for ECEs

Consider partnering with the NEA Center for Social Justice

Classroom Management for ECEs

Consider partnering with the NEA Center for Great Public Schools

Social Event for New Educators

Consider partnering with a local business, like a restaurant or pickleball court

While local leaders should be involved with the planning and promotion of the ECE event, make sure to let your new leaders shine!



Promoting your ECE Event

Use these helpful tips to promote your ECE event:

- Create a **new logo or color scheme**
- Use a **consistent RSVP system** like EveryAction to collect accurate contact information (*including home emails and cell phone numbers*)
- Send out **multiple reminders** that clearly list the details of the event
- **Announce your next event at the current one** and ask your attendees to invite other ECEs to the next one
- Take advantage of NEA **tools like Hustle** to promote your event

After the Event

Set yourself up for success in the future with these tips:

- Meet with your core team and brainstorm **what can be improved**
- **Follow up with attendees** to get feedback after the event
- Identify **any new leaders who emerged** from the first event and invite them to participate in your core group and future planning
- Post **pictures from the event on social media** and promote future events to show ECEs how your group can be valuable for them

Best Practices from Affiliates with Successful ECE Groups

Foster Ownership & Community

- Actively listen to new members when they express concerns and discuss professional issues.
- Invite ECEs to create and develop their own groups. It promotes ownership and offers an opportunity to invest in something beyond their classroom.
- Build leadership pathways within the ECE group that connect to the Association.
- Create opportunities for community-building and sharing between ECE peers (see suggestions in Appendix 1).



Make a Commitment

- Resource the ECE group appropriately with staff, time, and money.
- Avoid “one-offs” by planning events in a series and connecting them to the other work of the state association or local.
- Focus on sustaining the ECE group by building a program that will outlast any one member or staff lead.



Grow Your Power

- Educate the ECE group about their union and its victories.
- Train ECEs to become organizers. They are often successful in recruiting, engaging, and supporting each other.
- Be opportunistic. Every event is a chance to capture contact information for future organizing.
- Put professional issues at the center of the work.



Demonstrate Value

- Create and implement relevant professional, social, and emotional supports that meet the needs of ECEs.
- Show that the Association is the path to a successful and meaningful career as an educator.



Friendship and Community in ECE Groups

When we focus on big-picture issues in our movement-building, it can be easy to lose sight of the importance of friendship and community. However, friendship and community are critical to all solid organizing, and especially for ECEs, who may lack connections in a new workplace. ECEs will want to participate in your group if meetings are fun! Use these strategies to add social time to your events:

- Begin events with icebreakers like Rose, Bud, Thorn
(each participant shares something that went well this week, something that they're looking forward to, and something that didn't go so well)
- Include time for social interaction in every agenda
- Schedule casual meet-up time for ECEs after school or during lunch every few weeks

Appendix 1: ECE Engagement Map

Strategy	Year 1 (Level 101 Foundational)	Year 2 (Level 201 Mobilizing & Power-Building)	Year 3 (Level 301 Agenda-Driving)
Leadership Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend local training for leadership development Train members on the history and structure of the NEA and state affiliates Establish a race/class narrative and other foundational racial and social justice opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend leadership summit Develop a campaign and run for local office or a committee chair Attend Minority Leadership Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit an RFP to present at leadership summit Identify potential leaders to mentor Facilitate a Minority Leadership Training Session
Member Organizer/Activist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce to organizing via local issue campaigns Expose members to a local, state, and national calendar of activist opportunities Establish a race/class narrative and other foundational racial and social justice opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Become a Member Organizer Identify and/or participate in a state or national campaign around an issue important to ECEs Examine current district policies for racial and social justice inequities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit, train, lead, and mentor other Member Organizers Lead a team on an organizing campaign Develop and implement a plan that addresses and changes the inequities found in the policies, and actively recruit diverse Member Organizers
Professional Practice Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend a professional learning opportunity offered by the local, state, or national association Participate in learning labs or similar professional learning communities Establish a race/class narrative and other foundational racial and social justice opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop professional learning content with a partner—and deliver Gain micro-credentials to deepen knowledge and become an expert Examine current district curriculum for racial and social justice inequities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a professional learning cadre Become a coach or mentor in your area of expertise Develop and implement a plan that addresses and changes the inequities found in curricula